

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 STATE 029793
ORIGIN NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 R

DRAFTED BY INR/RNA/NE: J R HOOPER

APPROVED BY INR: M PACKMAN

NEA: N VELIOTES

INR/RNA: P H STODDARD

S/S-0 J THYDEN

-----040864 040047Z /65

R 040011Z PEB 78 ZFF4

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

S E C R E T STATE 029793

NODIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1,4

TAGS: PGOV, SY, JO

SUBJECT: SYRIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD NEGOTIATIONS

REF: DAMASCUS 7773; AMMAN 4381

FOR AMBASSADOR FROM SAUNDERS

1. YOUR HELPFUL ANALYSES CONTAINED IN THE TWO REFTELS
HAVE STIMULATED US TO RECONSTRUCT THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS
WHICH LED ASSAD TO INFORM THE SECRETARY THAT SYRIAN
PARTICIPATION AT GENEVA WOULD BE SUSPENDED UNTIL A 'NEW
EQUILIBRIUM' HAD BEEN FOUND. LOOKING BACK OVER THE RECORD,
WE ARE PERSUADED THAT THE JORDANIANS HAVE NOT DELIBERATELY
DISTORTED THE SYRIAN POSITION IN ORDER TO ENHANCE THE
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ATTRACTIVENESS OF AMMAN AS A POTENTIAL NEGOTIATING
PARTNER. WE BELIEVE THAT SHARAF'S OBSERVATION TO THE
SECRETARY PROBABLY REFLECTED A MISREADING ON HIS PART OF
SYRIAN POLITICS; OF COURSE, HE MAY HAVE EXAGGERATED THE
IMPORTANCE OF KHADDAM'S REMARK.

2. IN A NUTSHELL, WE SPECULATE THAT THE BAATH PARTY LEADERSHIP RECOMMENDED TO ASSAD, AFTER DELIBERATING OVER THE CONTENT OF THE VARIOUS VERSIONS OF THE WORKING PAPER, THAT SYRIA SHOULD NOT ATTEND THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON THE BASIS OF THE CONDITIONS SET FORTH. WHILE THIS

RECOMMENDATION WOULD NOT BE BINDING ON ASSAD, IT SERVED NOTICE ON HIM THAT HE WOULD FACE AN UPHILL BATTLE WITHIN THE PARTY TRYING TO JUSTIFY ACCEPTANCE OF GENEVA ON THE BASIS OF THE WORKING PAPER.

3. THIS HYPOTHESIS HELPS TO EXPLAIN WHY ASSAD WORKED SO HARD TO PERSUADE US TO AMEND THE WORKING PAPER. IN EFFECT, ASSAD WAS TELLING US THAT HE WOULD BE WILLING TO DISENGAGE BAATHIST HARDLINERS FROM A ROLE IN SYRIAN POLICY FORMATION BUT ONLY IF WE COULD PROVIDE TANGIBLE EVIDENCE OF ACCOMMODATION TO THE BASIC SYRIAN CONCERNS WHICH ASSAD RAISED.

4. WHILE KEEPING THE DOOR AJAR FOR US AND ISRAELI COMPROMISES, HOWEVER, ASSAD APPARENTLY WAS DUBIOUS ABOUT THE PROSPECTS OF OBTAINING THESE CONCESSIONS. AS YOU WILL RECALL, DURING A BACKGROUND SESSION WITH ZAID RIFAI TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF SADAT'S JERUSALEM VISIT, ASSAD REPORTEDLY MUSED TO RIFAI THAT SYRIA WOULD NOT ATTEND GENEVA. ASSAD APPARENTLY HAD EMPLOYED HARSHER RHETORIC WITH ARAFAT A FEW DAYS EARLIER WHEN HE

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CHARACTERIZED THE SECOND VERSION OF THE WORKING PAPER AS "INSULTING." ASSAD ALSO TOLD ARAFAT THAT THE WORKING PAPER OFFERED NO REASON FOR THE ARABS TO ATTEND GENEVA.

5. THUS, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT, BY LATE OCTOBER, THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP HAD CONCLUDED THAT THE CONCESSIONS NEEDED TO PERMIT THE SYRIANS TO ATTEND WOULD NOT BE FORTHCOMING. KHADDAM MAY HAVE HAD THIS CONCLUSION IN MIND WHEN HE TOLD SHOEFI THAT SYRIA WOULD BLOCK GENEVA. KHADDAM MAY HAVE COMMUNICATED THESE SENTIMENTS TO SHARAF AS WELL; THIS WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE COME AS NO SURPRISE TO THE COURT CHIEF, AS HE HAD BEEN EXPOSED TO KHADDAM'S HOSTILE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE WORKING PAPER DURING THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S OCTOBER 17 VISIT TO JORDAN. THIS VISIT, AS YOU KNOW, LED TO SHARAF'S SHUTTLE BETWEEN DAMASCUS AND CAIRO SHORTLY THEREAFTER AND THE KING'S SUBSEQUENT VISITS TO ASSAD AND SADAT.

6. THE DECISION BY ELEMENTS OF THE BAATH PARTY HIERARCHY TO REFUSE TO ATTEND GENEVA, DESCRIBED IN TWO INTELLIGENCE REPORTS SUPPLIED BY THE JORDANIANS, STRIKES US AS THE

FORMAL RATIFICATION OF THE SYRIAN ATTITUDE REFERRED TO ABOVE THAT HAD BECOME EVEN MORE HOSTILE IN THE WAKE OF THE SADAT VISIT TO JERUSALEM. WHILE THE REPORTS UNHELPFULLY DATE THE DECISION AS "RECENT," IN THE CONTEXT OF BAATH PARTY DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL AHMAR'S ALLEGED DECEMBER 3 REMARKS, THEY DIFFER FROM EARLIER INTELLIGENCE REPORTS IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER WHICH

DESCRIBED THE SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT IN DAMASCUS CONCERNING GENEVA. FROM THESE REPORTS, WE INFER THAT THE DEBATE WAS STILL RAGING DURING THAT PERIOD, ALTHOUGH IT IS POSSIBLE TO ARGUE THAT THE TOP PARTY COMMAND HAD ALREADY REACHED ITS DECISION BUT HAD NOT PASSED THE WORD TO THE LOWER ECHELONS. HOWEVER, THE REPORTED DECISION NOT TO GO TO GENEVA IS CONSISTENT WITH PUBLIC SYRIAN
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COMMENTARY THAT SYRIAN REPRESENTATIVES WILL NOT BE PRESENT AT ANY GATHERING CONVENED AS FOLLOW-UP TO THE CAIRO CONFERENCE.

7. IN SUM, WE DOUBT THAT THE SYRIANS HAVE BEEN STRINGING US ALONG AFTER SECRETLY DECIDING NOT TO ATTEND GENEVA. KHADDAM'S COMMENTS TO SHARAF, IN OUR VIEW, REFLECT HIS HOSTILITY TO THE WORKING PAPER AND HIS AWARENESS OF THE HARDENING ATTITUDES OF THE REGIME. KHADDAM'S LINE PROBABLY CONVEYED TO SHARAF THE NOTION THAT A FORMAL DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN ON ATTENDANCE AT GENEVA. INSTEAD, WE THINK THAT THE FORMAL BAATH PARTY RECOMMENDATION WAS NOT RATIFIED UNTIL AFTER THE SADAT VISIT TO JERUSALEM. VANCE

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TO WHITE HOUSE IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 029793

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FOL STATE 029793 SENT ACTION DAMASCUS AMMAN FEB 4, 1978
REPEATED TO YOU QUOTE

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UNQUOTE VANCE

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a

*** Current Classification *** SECRET

Message Attributes

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Status: <DBA CORRECTED> gwr 970827
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TAGS: PDIP, PGOV, JO, SY, PDIP
To: AMMAN DAMASCUS
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